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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 9th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 16 June 2005, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

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05-38731 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Question of New Caledonia (A/AC.109/2005/13, A/AC.109/2005/L.9)

2. **Mr. Rokolaqa** (Fiji) introduced draft resolution A/AC.109/2005/L.9 on behalf of the sponsors, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, and drew attention to paragraphs 7 and 15. The latter was intended to acknowledge the efforts of other States to provide a conducive environment for New Caledonia's economic and political participation in the region.

3. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2005/L.9 was adopted.*

Questions of American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Guam, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St. Helena, Turks and Caicos Islands and United States Virgin Islands (A/AC.109/2005/3-15)

Hearing of a representative of a Non-Self-Governing Territory

4. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Corbin (United States Virgin Islands) took a place at the Committee table.*

5. **Mr. Corbin** (United States Virgin Islands) said that the United States Virgin Islands had begun making annual statements to the Special Committee in 1979, and shortly thereafter to the Fourth Committee. Although 26 years had elapsed, the constitutional and political status of the Territory remained unchanged. Member States were to be commended for their recent recommendations regarding political education and information on options available to residents of Non-Self-Governing Territories, as well as their right to own their natural resources. If all the resolutions adopted and recommendations made had been implemented, the Territories would be much further along in their path towards self-government.

6. In 1990, there had been 18 Non-Self-Governing Territories; now, 15 years later there were still 16 on the list. The lack of progress could not be blamed entirely on the administering Powers; the people of the Territories had not received adequate information on decolonization and self-determination. While the Special Committee should be commended for its website, the latter contained only official United Nations documentation and working papers. More analysis of the issues was needed. One positive example of implementation had been the special mission to Bermuda, which represented an innovative approach.

7. Noting that the General Assembly had adopted a variety of resolutions, some supporting the participation of the United States Virgin Islands in the Caribbean Community and other regional organizations, others requesting the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to assist the Territory with political education projects, and yet others calling for the return of marine resources, he said that it would be useful to know if the Islands had joined CARICOM, if UNESCO had responded and whether the resources had indeed been returned.

8. He appreciated the Chairman's more focused approach to implementation, and hoped that the energy from the recent regional seminar would not be allowed to dissipate. The price of letting the situation remain unchanged had become higher than the price of change.

9. *Mr. Corbin withdrew.*

Hearing of a petitioner

10. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Moorhead (African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA)) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

11. **Mr. Moorhead** (African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA)) said that the people of the islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John, having been under the colonial domination of Denmark from 1666 to 1917 and subsequently under that of the United States of America, had yet to recover from the cultural, political and socio-economic underdevelopment imposed by colonization and slavery. They were now poised to explore self-determination through various local initiatives. For example, the Committee for St. Croix Self-Government had succeeded in bringing attention to the many disparities left in place by colonial constructs. Meanwhile, in an effort to establish an identity separate from the limitations imposed by its political status, the Territory was approaching another constitutional convention.

12. Many of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories carried the same burdens and existed under the same circumstances. He wished, however, to propose a new paradigm for international reconciliation and repair, to enable both colonizer and colonized to cultivate a relationship that would allow future generations to flourish.

13. The founders of the United Nations had cited the Biblical prophecy of Isaiah when establishing the international body: "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." He would use the same reference material — the Bible — specifically Chapters 28 and 30 of the book of Deuteronomy, as the basis for the hypothesis that African descendants in the Caribbean, like other colonized peoples around the world, were plagued by a spiritual problem. They believed their captivity to be a judgement for disobedience: that they had been brought into slavery by the Danes, but delivered into captivity by God. Thus they blamed themselves — not Denmark — for their enslavement.

14. Peoples who had been colonized or enslaved must take a comprehensive view of the meaning of reparations. They should go beyond seeking reparation for specific acts and should seek to transform the old global order, and make it better. Reparations were not about money but about repairing the mentality, psychology, culture, society and institutions that had been damaged by the colonial system. More important than money received or lands recovered was the opportunity a reparations campaign offered for the rehabilitation of Black people by Black people. But those who campaigned for reparations could not hope to change the world without changing their own mentality and asking what weaknesses in their society had made colonization and slavery possible.

15. In April 2005, in his capacity as President of ACRRA, he had headed a delegation of Virgin Islanders who had travelled to Denmark to discuss the issue of reparations. The talks had resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding establishing a Joint Task Force on Reparations, the first accord of its kind between organizations in Europe and the Caribbean directly acknowledging that descendants of enslaved Africans had suffered economic, psychological, social and emotional harm as a result of the European institution of slavery.

16. African descendants in the West must not wish for Europe to fall so they could rise. A repaired people must be in the vanguard of reconciliation and use those new formulas to usher in the long-awaited era of peace on earth.

17. *Mr. Moorhead withdrew.*

Hearing of a representative of a Non-Self-Governing Territory

18. **The Chairman**, recalling that he had led the recent special mission to Bermuda to gather first-hand information about the situation on the ground, said that he had received a communication from a representative of the Government of Bermuda, who happened also to be a member of the Bermuda Independence Commission with whom the special mission had met. He also wished to acknowledge the presence of four young students, winners of the recent competition for the best essay on independence, who had accompanied her. In view of those special circumstances he asked the Committee to allow the students to address it following the statement by the Government representative.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.10 a.m.

19. *At the invitation of the Chairman, and since there were no objections, the representative of the Government of Bermuda and the four young Bermudian students accompanying her took places at the Committee table.*

20. **Ms. Kempe** (Bermuda Independence Commission) said that Bermuda had enjoyed a parliamentary form of Government for almost 400 years and in 1968 had received its first written Constitution, under which the Governor and the Head of State were responsible for external affairs, defence, internal security and the police, and the Bermudian Premier and Cabinet were responsible for internal affairs through the legislature. From the public's point of view, Bermuda had been self-governing since 1968. While the public had rarely been aware of interference in the past, the Governor's recent overruling of the Premier's advice regarding the appointment of the current Chief Justice had attracted much publicity and

underscored that the United Kingdom could and would interfere when it saw fit.

21. The issue independence had been debated sporadically over the past 37 years. A referendum had been held some 10 years earlier but the opposition party at that time had refused to participate and had urged its supporters to do the same, resulting in a poor turnout and strong negative vote. That party — the Progressive Labour Party — was now in its second term.

22. In late 2004, the Premier had announced the establishment of the Bermuda Independence Commission. Ironically, the current opposition was not involved in the independence debate. The Commission's terms of reference were to generate discussion of the pros and cons of independence, disseminate information and raise public awareness, organize national dialogue through the media and public meetings, collect data, procure the services of consultants on legal, constitutional, consular and other matters, and prepare monthly reports on its discussions followed by a comprehensive report with recommendations. Both types of report were to be submitted to the Cabinet. The Commission, whose members reflected Bermuda's population, interviewed many different stakeholders in Bermuda, in order to gain a better understanding of the issues, and had met with civil servants and diplomats from a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, in order to learn from other countries' experiences what it would mean to be an independent small State. It had also held 10 public meetings and received a large number of written and oral submissions from Bermudian residents. Having decided early on that it was important to involve Bermuda's youth in the debate, it had also visited every secondary school on the island and organized an essay-writing competition, school quiz and debate competition, the winners of which would later be addressing the Committee.

23. She then presented the main points that the Commission had learned from its work. First, the fact that, since the 2002 Act, certain Bermudians had British nationality and could therefore reside and work without a permit in the United Kingdom or any other European Union country was extremely important to Bermudians, as it offered young people an opportunity to study and work in Europe and Bermudians in general an alternative place to live and work should Bermuda's fragile economy undergo a crisis. The British Government had advised the Commission that those Bermudians who had been granted British nationality under the 2002 Act would probably lose it should Bermuda become independent. Second, the United Kingdom had made it clear to the Commission that the only options available to Bermuda were to maintain the status quo or become an independent State. Third, some people felt that the best way to solve Bermuda's significant social and cultural problems — which included racism, drugs, crime, gangs and violence — was through nationhood and a common identity, while others felt that such problems had nothing to do with independence and should be solved regardless.

24. There was neither a financial imperative for change nor any substantial impasse with the administering Power. Many Bermudians saw little or no British influence and saw no need for change while others saw independence as the necessary last step in shaking off slavery, colonialism and segregation. Both groups held equally strong views. While the education process undertaken by the Commission might not have changed very many people's minds, it had at least clarified what independence would mean for Bermuda and Bermudians. The Commission would ensure that a copy of its report, which was due to be delivered to Cabinet at the end of the current month, was sent to the Committee once it had been made public.

25. **Mr. Requeijo Gual** (Cuba) said that he would appreciate more information concerning the Bermudian people's spirit of self-determination. In particular, given that apparently the Bermudian economy had no serious financial problems, he failed to understand why Bermudians were concerned that, without British nationality, they would have no alternative place to live and work in the event of an economic crisis. He wondered if the feeling was widespread; it was difficult to understand why the entire population would leave in the event of an economic crisis rather than stay in the country and seek internal solutions.

26. **Ms. Kempe** (Bermuda Independence Commission) said that international financial services currently made up some 70 per cent of the Bermudian economy; the other pillar of the economy was tourism. Bermuda's main commodity was its people and financial services know-how. The country currently enjoyed a thriving economy and, unlike previous colonies, had no financial imperatives to push it towards independence. International business had

worked to make the Bermudian people understand the economic importance of the financial services sector. They viewed independence as a change that might threaten that sector. Furthermore, if economic circumstances were to become dire in an independent State, there were concerns that future generations might not be as free to migrate abroad, particularly given the increasing restrictions on migration in the wake of 11 September 2001.

27. **Ms. Beckles** said that her grandmother, who had endured segregation in Bermuda and had been forced to leave school at the age of 13 because of a lack of funding, had helped to convince her that independence would benefit the country. Independence would allow Bermuda to make its own decisions on vital matters such as housing, crime control and water use and to act as a fully fledged State member of the United Nations.

28. **Ms. Collis** said that the debate launched in school had helped to clarify the pros and cons of Bermudian independence. The decision on independence for Bermuda must be the product of a referendum. Although she believed that Bermuda should not pursue the path of independence, she stood ready to support her country whatever its decision.

29. **Ms. Bland Gordon** said that while it would be gratifying to raise a Bermudian flag and hear the Bermudian national anthem at the forthcoming Olympics, the country should not become independent, as Bermudian nationals might lose the benefits afforded to them by their British passports, particularly fairly trouble-free travel and access to other countries around the world.

30. **Ms. Bean** said that Bermudians must become better informed about and overcome fears of independence. Ten years previously they had been presented with a yes-or-no referendum without being adequately informed about the reasons to vote in favour or against independence. They were once again faced with a choice. They must explore their options and take risks so that the country might truly be a Bermuda for Bermudians.

31. **Mr. Xie** Yunliang (China) said that whatever Bermuda's status, the Bermudian delegation would be welcomed at the next Olympic Games, which would be held in China.

32. **Mr. Ovia** (Papua New Guinea) said that he had believed that Bermuda was self-governing and economically strong and should therefore be delisted. The statements by the representative of the Bermuda Independence Commission and schoolchildren showed the importance of education and debate, which should be encouraged to enable the Bermudian people to exercise their right to self-determination.

33. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that he would like further explanation on how the debate on independence in Bermuda had unfolded.

34. **Ms. Kempe** (Bermuda Independence Commission) said that the Commission had been surprised to learn that most of the young persons whom it encountered initially had little interest in or understanding of independence. Only a small minority had been in favour of it. The level of knowledge, however, had risen dramatically since the beginning of its efforts to raise awareness about the issue. She hoped that schools would continue to educate children on the issues concerning independence to help them to better understand globalization and the responsibilities incumbent upon countries as they interacted with one another and to reach their own views on an independent Bermuda.

The meeting rose at 12 p.m.